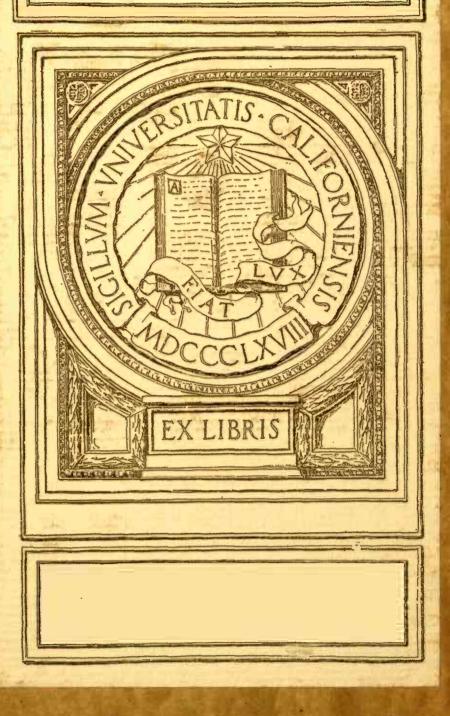


GIFT OF



The Missions

Fourte F. Mansfield



Foreword

RITTEN after visiting the old Missions of California, built nearly one hundred and fifty years ago. They are now but picturesque ruins along El Camino Real—(the King's Highway)—pathetic reminders of early Spanish days, when the dry wastes of California were first transformed into fertile lands, through the faith, and untiring efforts of the Franciscan Fathers and neophyte Indians, led by that great soul, Fra Junipero Serra.

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The Message of the Missions



I

And from the past a wreath of mem'ries steal;

Seek from the missions, built to live for aye, The message their mute ruins speak, today.

II

From San Diego to Sonoma's dells,
The highway still is marked by mission bells,
By Spanish monks erected there, of yore,
To point the trail along an unknown shore.
No fairer road in all the land is found,
By ocean laved, by misty mountains crowned;
It is the "King's Highway" today, as then,
When it was trod by Priest and Indian.

III

HERE once, o'er dusty stretch of sunbaked shale,

Dotted with cactus clumps along the trail,
The pious Padre toiled along the way,

From shrine to shrine,—full forty miles a day,—

Bearing his torch to light the wilderness,
To teach the savage, and to shrive, to bless,
He's seen no more; his fleeting day hath passed.
Change marks the trail; the scene seems all
recast:

A smooth road beckons far o'er vale and knoll, Along which speeding autos swiftly roll, As roll the years; (a century, and more, Since Serra landed on our western shore). Gay, laughing crowds flash by, with merry peal;

All, now, is joy on El Camino Real.

Behold the mission in its sheltered nest,
Hidden by trees, so cloistered and serene,
By casual passerby is scarcely seen.
Here came Fra Junipero, Priest of Spain,
And founded the first mission; here remain
The ancient walls of 'dobe; Time hath wrought
Decay and ruin. Man's work, brought to
naught,

Holds yet a solemn beauty. Who hath seen
Its faded portals, decked in living green,
Must feel the touch Divine which lingers
there,—

A peaceful calm, like Saint enwrapped in pray'r.

V

Northward we turn, and follow where you lead, Junipero, upholder of the creed.

Of gorgeous colors, all along the way; Crimson and yellow, mauves, and azure blue, Cov'ring far ridges, meet the searching view. The horny cactus, in her sand-locked bow'r, Feels Spring's approach, puts forth a lovely flow'r;

Great corrugated canyons, hewn from sand, Like masterpieces of some sculptor, stand Encrowned, where golden poppies bow and nod, A paying tribute mute unto their God;—And wondrous sight, as far as eye can reach, The fair Pacific laves a sunlit beach, With fleecy, foam-tipped waves of misty blue, Like lacy flounces, flung to flaunt at you.

VII

Junipero, the way is very fair Which you found rough, and dangerous, and bare.

VIII

THE road turns from the sea at Oceanside; We follow where the mission bells still guide

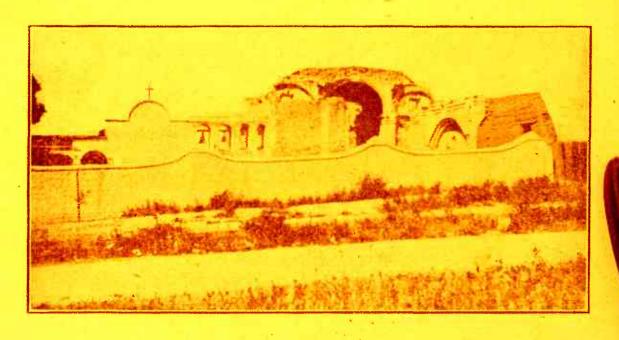
The stranger-traveler. 'Tis the "King's High-

The King of Kings, forever and a day!
A steady climb, a quick descent, and there
San Luis Rey invites to rest and pray'r.
At one time richest mission in the land,
Still stands serene, defying Time's rough hand;

Rebuilt in part, is useful still.



SAN LUIS REY



JUAN CAPISTRANO

IX

Not So
The ancient walls of Juan Capistrano,
Whose bells hang mute in fast decaying arch,
Accepting meekly Time's relentless march.
No more the Padres grinding at their mills;
No vineyards purp'ling on the rugged hills.

OS ANGELES Mission sees a busy mart Grown to her doors, around her sturdy heart,

But, like some patriarch from out the past, Preserves a dignity until the last. San Gabriel, her belfry tow'r uprears, A benediction o'er the passing years; Her outer garb of vari-tinted gold, Conceals the wrack within her bosom's fold.

XI

HERE sea, and sky, and mountain blend as one,—

Where beauty reigns supreme beneath the sun,—

Where ravages of time lie scarce revealed, By art and friendly vine so well concealed, Saint' Barbara, restored to fair estate, Welcomes the wanderer within her gate.

XII

JN ruins stand the walls of San Miguel; San Juan, and Santa Ynez, their vigils still Are keeping, like pale ghosts of life bereft, Gaunt specters of past glories, all that's left. How bravely they their tott'ring walls reveal To all who pass o'er El Camino Real. The herds that grazed upon the hillsides, and The Indians who tilled the fertile land, Have disappeared with all the prosp'rous scene, Leaving but barren stretches, parched and lean.



SAN JUAN MISSION

XIII

ROM San Diego to Sonoma's dells

Each shrine the same old tale of ruin tells.

A rosary of missions! One by one,

We leave them crumbling 'neath the summer sun;

Yet from the hand of Time some wonder-flow'r

Yet from the hand of Time some wonder-flow'r Of promise pluck, to deck Hope's age-worn bow'r.

XIV

Behind the starry veil of evening fades.

We travel fast, but Time hath gone before;
Hath laid his blight upon each mission door;
Cold embers choke their sacred altar fires;
No spark is left that kindles or inspires.
All, all decay. Ah, Fra, could you review
The proud and stately structures reared by you,
'Twould break your kind old heart, so staunch and true.

XV

The spirit of Fra Junipero speaks, As if to quiet our regret, he seeks:

XVI

THE missions which we built in such fine pride,

Have had their day, and like man, drooped and died.

They dreamed their dreams, as haply, we dream ours;

They bore aloft the torch, and plucked the flow'rs,

And sang their song of hope. Incline thy ear; The song still lingers, if thou care to hear.

XVII

Song of the Padres

No life, however blest, but hath its cloud; No life, however blest, but hath its grief; No damask rose but finds its autumn shroud Beneath the mould of sere and shriveled leaf. No darkling cloud but has an inner light; No withered rose but sheds a fragrance rare; A waiting sunbeam pierces ev'ry night,—God's love shines forth, victorious ev'rywhere.

XVIII

THE message of the mission, then, is: Naught Endureth but pure love! Unselfish thought

Outlives the finest structure built by hand; 'Tis simple truth, but hard to understand. The inner motive that inspires his deed, Is man's true measure,—not, alone, his creed.

XIX

In the vast realms of Universal Mind,
There is an essence that makes all mankind
Akin to all, and all akin to each;
This is the truest lesson Life would teach;
No sinner but can claim the source of all,—
No Saint but has resisted Satan's call.

XX

With blistered feet, who paused anon, to pray, And prayed that all humanity might be Saved and rewarded in eternity; And the street gamin, urchin of the dust, Who shared with hungry dog his single crust, Have not in vain their sacrifices made, 'Though all the land forget where they are laid. Although the missions crumble and decay Their spirit lives! In gen'rous service, they Gave love, nor can a greater gift be giv'n; 'Tis love, alone, unlocks the gates of heav'n.

Florence N. Mansfield.



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